

LAB REPORT

Manufacturer's rated output

(5 main channels): 125W (20Hz-20kHz, 8Ω, 0.2%THD)

Measured power output @ 1kHz

(2-channel): 145W (8Ω, 0.1% THD);
245W (4Ω, 0.1% THD)

Measured power output @ 1kHz

(5-channel): 130W (8Ω, 0.1% THD);
210W (4Ω, 0.1% THD)

Fidelity firewall: 140W @ 0.05% THD (8Ω)

Distortion @ 50W: 0.04% (8Ω, 1kHz)

Freq response: 20Hz-20kHz +/-0.45dB

SOCKETS

PROCESSOR

7 line audio inputs & 1 balanced XLR balanced input; 1 x 8-channel analogue input; 2 x tape circuits; 4 composite & 4 S-video inputs; composite & S-video outputs with and without OSD; 2 component video inputs; 4 x coaxial & 4 x optical digital inputs; coaxial digital output; 2 x 8-channel outputs; 1 x unbalanced & 1 x balanced XLR; 4 x trigger out; 1 x I/R in; 12V in/out; RS232 comms; RC5 input (for external controllers)

POWER AMP

XLR-balanced & phono-unbalanced input per channel; 4mm binding post loudspeakers outputs

KRELL SHOWCASE PROCESSOR & SHOWCASE 5 POWER AMP

◆ £4,495/£5,000 (APPROX) ◆ 020 8971 3909 ◆ www.krellonline.com

Showcase is part of the HEAT (High End Home Theatre) range from Krell, consisting of a processor and five, six and seven-channel versions of the matching multichannel power amp. It's the five-channel model that we are testing here. By Krell standards it is far from high end, but by any normal standards, of course, this is precisely what it is. The Krell is very much in line with upmarket alternatives from TAG McLaren, Lexicon and others.

Processing

The Showcase processor is equipped with a powerful DSP processing and D/A section, based on 24-bit 192kHz Burr Brown devices for all channels. All the usual multichannel options are present and correct, plus nine proprietary Krell surround modes, including a potentially useful 'stereo+' subwoofer mode and the ability to flash upgrade the internal ROM when new or revised options become available. Video switching is up to high-definition specifications, which means a wider bandwidth than is strictly required for any of the current or proposed European broadcast standards. Custom

install is also well catered-for, with four triggers to control your lighting, screen up/down, screen masking and power amp. These are fully compatible with the more popular system controllers. Surprisingly however, there is no second-room, second-zone output, perhaps because it would have meant too many sonic compromises at this price. The Showcase is capable of balanced operation, with a single balanced input and balanced outputs for all channels. There is a real benefit when using long leads to drive the power amp.

Processor setup is comprehensive and versatile. I'll wager that you get more from it than almost any other processor. The quid quo pro is that making all the adjustments is a lengthy operation that requires meticulous care and attention. All inputs are fully assignable and have programmable default sound-processing modes and other settings. Unusual extra features include a subwoofer volume limit setting and one that restricts the maximum volume of the system as a whole. Another unusual feature is a full



seven-channel three-band-per-channel parametric (adjustable centre frequency) room equaliser. The type of filter and its parameters can be adjusted within wide limits and with some precision, but the key settings are not quite comprehensive or fine-tuneable enough to adjust for room-resonant modes with the precision required to do the job properly. What it can do extremely well, however, is general tonal tweaking on a channel-by-channel basis, which, with care, can adjust recalcitrant speakers that don't quite match the others.

Power

Unlike some of the power amps we've looked at in this issue, the 5-channel Showcase power amplifier is built around a single toroidal transformer. This, however, is a massive specimen which provides an ample foundation to support the 125 Watts/channel power rating, which doubles into 40, the sure sign of a genuinely potent amplifier. The individual channels modules are based on the circuit topology used in Krell's FB series power amplifier which I would rate as among the finest amplifiers money can buy. Note that owners of the five or six-channel versions of the power amp can boost the number to seven at any time.



Operation
The Showcase components are a visual knockout. The casework is fabricated from brushed aluminium panels, with smoothly radiused polished edge caps and rounded corners. The remote control, which comes as a complete surprise, is an ultra-slim device that looks rather like an elongated credit card, with low profile membrane switches, but it has the feel of a get-u-started device and many Krell users will probably end up using dedicated controllers from specialists like AMX or Crestron.

The way this processor works takes some acclimatisation. For example, the two front-panel 'mode' keys access the default sound-processing algorithm and all the alternatives available for the input selected, which makes sense but is far from immediately obvious. The same applies to the 'preamp' button, which can be used to bypass all digital processing.

'The Showcase pairing is a real star, with many qualities that set it on a higher plane'

Even the initial installation holds traps for the unwary, though one important benefit of buying Krell is that you can be assured that the equipment will be installed and set up by your dealer. There is also the promise of product updates. Perhaps one of them will see the volume control law tamed for something less abrupt and more user-friendly.

A host of minor features can help the system work more seamlessly than many others of its type. Auto Migration, for example, allows the Showcase processor to switch to the analogue input automatically, which is useful with SACD/DVD-Audio players. Temporary speaker-level trim adjustments can be made easily on a per-session basis without losing the carefully programmed default settings.

The processor even boasts a front panel infra-red emitter to help programme a learning remote control. But the feeling remains that this is a system for the enthusiast, one not intimidated by the sometimes arcane workings of cinephile electronics.

Performance

The Showcase pairing is a real star, with many qualities that set it on a higher plane than its direct competition. Used in plain stereo with all digital

processing bypassed, the Krell has the easy-going power that is a characteristic of the brand. Turn the volume up and the sound responds with less change in character than most, which makes listening at high volumes unusually satisfying. But at low levels, the sound doesn't shrink away. Presence is maintained and fine detail remains audible.

These qualities are not achieved entirely without cost. The balance is perceptibly lean, even slightly dry, and with the wrong speakers the sound can become edgy and sibilant, though this is more because the Krell won't suffer fools gladly than because it is intrinsically edgy or sibilant itself.

Finally, the Showcase presentation doesn't have the almost physical force

that Krell stereo components tend to have – during this review I compared the pairing with a Krell KPS-25 (CD/preamp) and FB400 (power amp).

Verdict

So far, so good, but what happens in full Technicolor multichannel mode with all the digital stuff engaged? The answer is almost nothing. Nothing adverse that is. The character of the sound changes, but barely. It can seem a little more lean and slightly desiccated, perhaps a little less fluid and organic, but the changes are small and not always obvious at all. What is obvious, however, is the Krell's exquisite sense of detail, the sheer presence and vitality of the sound and, above all, the superb image steering that is apparent with Dolby and DTS recordings alike. This applies when there is no motion around the soundstage, or when all hell is breaking loose, such as early in the DTS mix of the special mega-edition of *The Fellowship of the Rings*. Timing is crisp and sharp; the soundstage cooks.

As usual, Dolby and DTS have their own slightly different flavours and, as usual, it is DTS that is harder-hitting and has more depth of image (try the opening from *Saving Private Ryan* in the R1 DTS mix and compare it to the R2 UK Dolby soundtrack to test this). But with either, the Krell extracts more useful information about what the recording engineer intended than most others.



FEATURES

KRELL SHOWCASE PROCESSOR

7.1-channel home cinema processor/preamplifier; THX Ultra-certified; Krell 7-channel digital room equaliser; HD bandwidth video switcher; analogue (preamp) pass-through mode; flash memory user upgradeable firmware

Surround formats supported: THX post-processing; THX Surround EX; Dolby Pro Logic II, Dolby Digital 5.1 & EX; DTS 5.1, ES, Discrete & Matrix, DTS Neo:6; THX Surround EX

Krell Surround Enhancement modes: Music Surround General Admission; Front Row; On Stage; Enhanced Stereo Orchestra; Mezzanine; Full Range & Sub; Monophonic; Party

Dimensions: 440(w) x 144(h) x 414(d) mm; **Weight:** 8.8kg

KRELL SHOWCASE 5 POWER AMP

Power output: 125 Watts/channel 8Ω; 250 Watts/channel 4Ω, 0.2Hz-95kHz -3dB <0.03% THD @ 1kHz

Dimensions: 439(w) x 570(h) x 198(d) mm; **Weight:** 25.3kg



The brushed aluminium panels are fastened by rounded chrome-edge caps

